

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN 2002

Data on educational attainment come from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS has tracked changes in education levels since 1947.

In 2002, the percentage of the civilian noninstitutionalized population 25 and older who had a high school diploma or more education remained unchanged from the previous year at 84 percent.¹ The percentage of people 25 to 29 with this much education (86 percent) was also statistically unchanged, indicating that increases in educational attainment among young adults may be leveling off, as shown in Figure 1.

In 2002, the percentage of women 25 and older with high school diplomas (84.4 percent) was higher than the percentage of men (83.8 percent) for the first time since the CPS began collecting these data. Among young women and men (25 to 29), the spread was greater: 88 percent and 85 percent, respectively.²

College Graduates

In 2002, more than one-quarter (27 percent) of adults 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or more education—an increase of about 1 percentage point over the previous year. The increase in the percentage of college graduates resulted from increases for women, non-Hispanic Whites, and Blacks.

¹ The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted. For more information on the accuracy of the data, see Appendix A.

² The percentage of high school graduates for women 25 and older and percentage of men 25 to 29 were not statistically different.

Words That Count

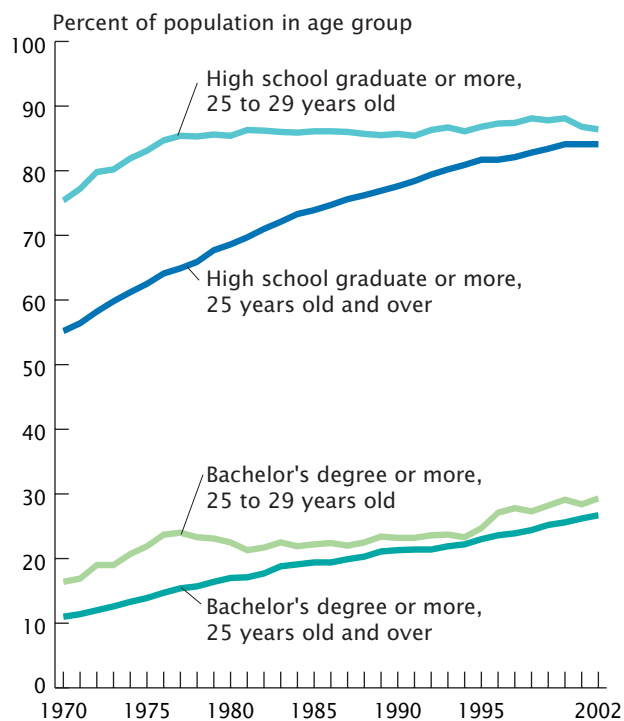
Educational attainment, as described in this report, is that of the population 25 and older. It is derived from a single question asked in the ASEC: "What is the highest grade of school . . . completed, or the highest degree . . . received?" Before 1992, educational attainment was measured in the CPS only by years of schooling completed.

Among people 25 and older, 29 percent of men and 25 percent of women held a bachelor's or higher degree. Among the younger set, 25 to 29, women were more likely to be college graduates than men. While 27 percent of young men held a bachelor's degree or more, 32 percent of young women did.

As shown in Figure 2, Asians and Pacific Islanders had the highest proportion of college graduates (47 percent), followed by non-Hispanic Whites (29 percent), Blacks (17 percent), and Hispanics (11 percent).³

³ Because Hispanics may be any race, data for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black and the Asian and Pacific Islander populations. Based on the population 25 and older surveyed in the CPS ASEC, 3.7 percent of the Black population and 4.3 percent of the Asian and Pacific Islander population were also Hispanic. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population are not shown in this section because of the small sample size in the 2002 CPS ASEC.

Figure 1.
**High School and College Graduates
by Age: 1970 to 2002**

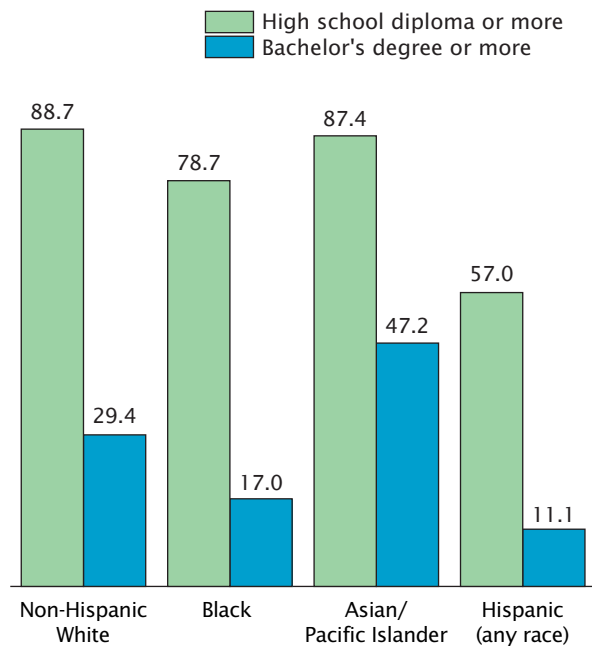


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1970 to 2002.

Figure 2.

Educational Attainment by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2002

(Percent of population aged 25 and older)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2002.

The proportion of Hispanics born in the United States who had a bachelor's degree or higher (14 percent) was larger than that of those born outside the country (9 percent). The corresponding rates for Asians and Pacific Islanders were closer—44 percent of those born in the United States and 48 percent of those born outside the United States.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports: *The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings* (P23-21) by Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Eric C. Newburger and *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 2000 (Update)* (P20-536) by Eric Newburger and Andrea Curry.

Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Click on "E" and select "Educational Attainment."

Contact the Census Bureau's Customer Service Center at 301-763-INFO (4636) or e-mail <pop@census.gov>.

Estimates of Work-Life Earnings (1999)

Over the past 25 years, the disparity in earnings among workers with different levels of educational attainment has increased. In 1975, full-time, year-round workers with a bachelor's degree earned 1.5 times as much as workers with only a high school diploma.⁴ By 1999, the ratio had risen to 1.8. During that same time period, the earnings ratio between people with advanced degrees and those with only a high school diploma increased from 1.8 to 2.6.⁵

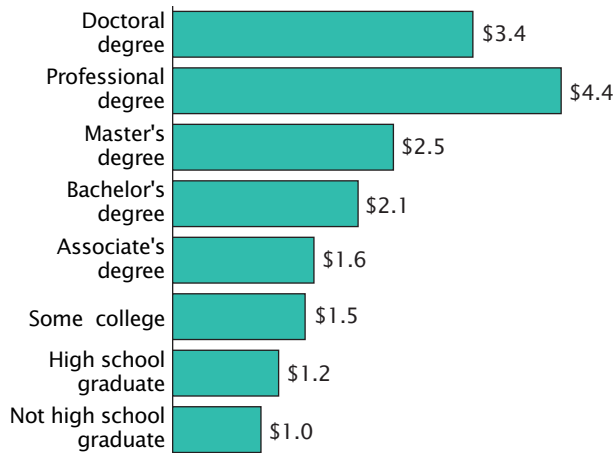
Synthetic estimates can illustrate the value of education over a hypothetical working life from age 25 to 64, as shown in Figure 3.⁶ CPS data collected in the March 1998, 1999, and

2000 supplements revealed that a high school dropout might expect to earn an average of \$1 million (in 1999 dollars) during a lifetime of work (40 years).⁷ Workers with a high school diploma

would earn about \$1.2 million. Some college experience but no degree would bring average life-time earnings up to \$1.5 million, while adding an associate's degree would increase earnings to \$1.6 million. Over a work life, a person with a bachelor's degree would earn \$2.1 million, on average, while lifetime earnings would be about \$2.5 million for those with a master's degree, \$3.4 million for those with a doctoral degree, and \$4.4 million for those with a professional degree.⁸

Figure 3.
Synthetic Work-Life Earnings Estimates for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers by Educational Attainment Based on 1997–1999 Work Experience

(In millions of 1999 dollars)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1998 to 2000.

⁴ Data are for full-time, year-round workers 18 years old and older.

⁵ Advanced degrees include master's, doctoral, and professional degrees.

⁶ Synthetic estimates of work-life earnings are created by using the working population's 1-year annual earnings and summing their age-specific average earnings for people ages 25 to 64. The resulting totals represent what individuals with the same educational level could expect to earn on average, in 1999 dollars, during a hypothetical 40-year working life.

⁷ Earnings data are collected for the year prior to the survey date. So, the 2000 CPS would have asked for earnings in 1999.

⁸ Some of the most common examples of professional degrees are M.D., J.D., D.D.S., and D.V.M.